

A RE-EVALUATION OF ROCK-CUT FISH INSTALLATIONS IN ROMAN CRETE

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ABSTRACT

The island of Crete preserves a series of rock-cut, coastal tanks that are thought to have been used for the holding and/or breeding of fish. These tanks seem to belong to the eastern Mediterranean tradition of fish tanks rather than the western Mediterranean, where masonry-built tanks are the norm. The Cretan examples, nonetheless, display ambiguous architectural elements that make their interpretation and precise usage unclear. Some of these tanks have been published, while others are relatively unknown. This article examines the evidence of rock-cut fish tanks from seven sites on Crete, and analyzes their physical remains, the probable mechanics of their use, and their chronology. Two broad categories of fish tank are identified, based on their relationship with the changes in sea level: those carved in the early Roman period and those fashioned after the serious seismic event of 365 CE. Finally, these fish tanks are considered within the context of such features at other eastern Mediterranean sites.